

Senator Joyce Mulliken
Presentation to: Army National Guard 1161st Transportation Company
December 4, 2004

What a privilege and honor it is to be with such a fine-looking group of patriots.

Before I begin – today I am accompanied by my husband, Mike, who is a Viet Nam Veteran. Also with me are my parents, Mervin and Georgia Curtis. My dad is a WWII Veteran.

I would also like to offer my remarks on behalf of my seatmate Rep. Jane'a Holmquist, here with me, and my colleague -- one of your very own -- Staff Sergeant, Senator Dave Schmidt. Welcome to Ephrata, Dave.

Many years ago – almost 40 years ago – when my husband returned from Vietnam – like so many of you gathered here today – I was so very, very proud of him. And, of course I was ecstatic to have him safely home.

When you returned as a unit to Boeing Field last August, Representative Holmquist and I were invited to join others to welcome you home. Our first response was “absolutely!” We were very excited and relieved to know you had returned home. But, on further reflection, I remembered how I felt when Mike returned after being gone 366 days (it was a Leap Year) ... and, I decided the last thing I would have wanted was to share him with “politicians giving welcome home speeches,” not matter how well intended. So, we regretfully declined in August, but asked to be part of welcoming you home when you returned to Ephrata as a unit -- after having time with your families and loved ones.

Last year, before you deployed to Iraq, I had the distinct honor of sponsoring a resolution in the Washington State Senate honoring the 1161st. In this resolution, you are referred to as “Guardians of American interests at home and abroad.”

You are “America’s Protectors.” And for being America’s Protectors, we thank you...we honor you...and we hold you in high esteem.

For many of you, your time spent overseas may have been a first for you. We all know how hot the middle of July can get here in Ephrata....but I know that you endured far worse.

You went through temperature extremes that most of us here will never understand. You found sand in places you never thought possible. You existed in a community where it was difficult to tell friend from foe. And you ate the same food...again...and again...and again!

In essence, you proudly bore the monotony and the inconvenience that is the burden of being America's Protectors.

But I think you know that you didn't go alone. They say: "Behind every great man is a great woman, or conversely – behind every great woman a great man."

Well, I think an even better saying is: "Behind every good soldier is a great wife...a great husband...a great sweetheart ...a great son or daughter...and great parents."

Because, let me tell you, that for every moment of fear you endured...there was someone back home praying for you.

For every moment of loneliness...there was someone back home writing you a letter or anxiously waiting for that scarce phone call.

For every birthday, holiday or anniversary missed...there was someone back home wrapping a care package for you.

For every moment of frustration and sadness....someone back home was looking through pictures of you, or old family photos of your great Aunt's birthday!

And believe me....for every minute you missed your sweetheart....there was somebody back home that wanted to kiss you like there was no tomorrow!

Men and women of the 1161st ... I don't know if you have had the opportunity – as a collective group – to offer your thanks and appreciation for those that accompanied you in spirit, but not in flesh, in Iraq....

But, I wonder if you could do that now? Can you applaud them to show them what they meant to you?

As each of you are a part of your own families, you are also a part of a larger family in the armed services. And, you are a part of this community. And since you left, this community has not been the same. There is a hole here that can only be filled by the men and women of the 1161st.

And let me just say....IT IS GOOD TO HAVE YOU HOME!

In closing – A couple of months ago I visited with General Scott West – he grew up in Moses Lake. He had just returned from Iraq as well. When I asked him to tell me his thoughts on the war in Iraq and the war against terrorism, he said, "I have not doubt – no doubt at all – if we were not defending American freedoms in Iraq, we would be fighting this battle on our own American soils." He repeated it once again ...

We, in America, in the state of Washington, here in Ephrata, owe you and your families a debt of gratitude. We are proud of you and we pray every day for you and your comrades for defending our American freedoms on foreign soils – and for helping those in other countries who have been brutalized by a tyrannical government.

God Bless you and God Bless America!